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RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION

Written statement*/ submitted by the Movement against Racism and for Friendship among Peoples, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[13 January 2001]

*/ This written statement is issued, unedited, as received in English and French from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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The MRAP (French movement against racism) urges the Commission to take all the necessary resolutions so that the World Conference against racism may be held in the most satisfactory conditions.

1- The topic of the Conference: "racism"

The idea of a world conference against racism has already been in our minds for a long time; for years NGOs have been demanding it, and when the Vienna and Copenhagen Conferences were held, the question of racism was evoked many times. As long as racism goes on causing damages, it is obvious that the practical realization of human rights cannot make a decisive advance. This Conference may be thought as having been delayed too long; racism went on developing, taking on news forms which beg for comments (ethnical violence for instance) and also real or imaginary problems which can be linked to migration and asylum. These new forms have also put to question the very idea of racism so that some research workers or militants wonder whether it should not give way to another word, a more relevant one with a wider conceptual scope. It is in this sense that the MRAP has already proposed to define "racism" as being " the general effect produced by the internalisation of structural inequality", which never appears as a chance product but always as the expression of a general law (whose subject may change).

Originally, racism was obviously considered as belonging to a biological order: it was the case for the so-called Darwinian racism of nazis, and it is also the case of different expressions of racism which refer to present or remanent colonial situations. For thirty years, racists have readily referred to some kind of cultural anthropology, which obviously foster the justification of ethnical hatred and the ideology of "separated development".

And also there is a kind of "social racism" particularly manifest in the USA through which there can be legitimated the rejection of a great number of Afro-Americans and Amerindians toward misery, drug-addiction, the collapsing of family structures, delinquency.... Because "those people don't care about their children's education" contrary to what may happen in "proper families" whose members can sometimes reach the highest offices.

The fact that the Conference may be held in South Africa is, of course, an honour to all the guests, but also makes these new dimensions all the more important.

2- Immigration and racism

The problem linked to immigration and asylum are particularly marked by "racism". Several aspects which are mentioned above are among the lot.

A frequent topic exploited by the extreme-right wing parties, is the threatened invasion of prosperous countries by a miserous, rough, inassimilable crowd: it is the phantasm of the invasion of the barbarians. We are often reminded that to-morrow's needs are linked to the workings of the new economy and ask more and more for skilled workers and not for the common lot of former immigration.

Some countries such as the USA and Germany already apply policies based on qualitative immigration and on a limited span resting on quotas. The "migratory pressure" still goes on feeding the phenomenon of undocumented migrant workers, insecure workers placed down as low as possible in social and economic life.

The condition of these insecure workers under official norms weighs on the labour market which goes on reinforcing ordinary racism among people.

There is a rising concern about witnessing the whole world separated into different parts inside each country, about those who are stable – the winners, and those as if by birth devoted to an extreme precarity and fighting as are the "ethnical" gang of young people and not so young ones.

Of course, there might be in favour of those lower people some act of public charity. It looks like what happens on a world scale between the "winning" nations and nations whose life is wrecked from start. But again one must deserve charity: recipients must limit their habits and their needs, manage their lives not to catch AIDS, give up polluting industrial activities which endanger our planet.

After a phase of differenciation or diversification of the forms of racism, one might then see a phase of homogenisation of these forms, with utmost chances given to a minority thanks to the exclusion of the greatest number.

We have not yet reached that point, of course, but the prospect can be conceived.

3- Racism and poverty

It is notorious that there is a relation between racism and social inequalities. This phenomenon is well-known within societies but it must be kept in mind that it can be found on a global level with unequal development and it is all the more important.

The situations of practically full dependency of poor countries toward the world market makes the birth and success of development policies quite unlikely. It should be necessary to resume the analysis of the Third World debt, of its real cost for the present and the future of these countries. Let us remember that a new strategy has appeared, that of the HIPC programme. According to this new scheme the deeply indebted poor countries could benefit by debt relief provided that they might fight against poverty within their own boundaries whilst their poverty has been precisely caused by their indebtedness. And also remember how is it possible to fight against poverty when the main part of national wealth must be given up to the repayment of the debt – even if it moderate ?

This unequal system involves all the possible ethnical conflicts, even wars. Nowadays, most of international migrations happen in the countries of the South leading more or less to bloody strife.

4- Taking basic decisions and practical measures

It is useful to analyse, denounce facts but it is also necessary to propose measures that can permit to act seriously on the causes, not only to make the effects more bearable...The fight against racism must not lag behind, must not cling to the effects whilst causes go on producing new forms of injustice.

The already well-known forms of fight must not be abandoned, for example, legal prosecutions. It is quite a job to have apologists of social hatred, the advocates of structural underlying inequality be sentenced. The supporters of Hitlerian theses cannot be protected by the expression of freedom whilst their own doctrines preach the repression of freedom. Some investigations have been made – and they must go on- in order to stop the broadcast of racist messages on the Web.

Political authorities must also involve themselves into practices of efficient fight against discrimination supported by the work already done by the associations and the unions...

But the Conference will have to go much further to take decisions for the short and medium term. For the short term, the Conference will have to ask the member states to pass antiracist penal law and also to ask the states of all the developed countries to sign and ratify the Convention for the protection of migrants workers' rights and those of their families. This ratification might produce an instant, if indirect effect: it would greatly spur young generations, born from immigration, to participate in the civic and political life of the country whose nationality they enjoy; indeed their parents would then reach an enlarged nationality, through the usage of political rights.

The groups of states, particularly the E.U must be asked to define a true policy of immigration and sanctuary, putting and end to the scandal of illegal immigrants and also the deportation of those asking for political asylum. For the medium term the Conference must decide that the debt has to be cancelled, it must ask the General Assembly to define a world policy for development, based on regional forces and putting and end to the leading countries' monetary hegemony.

There is, of course, a preliminary condition to all these measures. So that the Conference may take place and be successful, it is necessary for Governments, and particularly those of rich countries, to make arrangements to allow the Committee organizing the Conference to get the necessary resources. It is the first and foremost condition.